

Garden of the Ghost Town by FullMetalBitch

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Summary:

Everyone keeps telling him to move on, but Mike knows Eleven must be out there somewhere. Everyone keeps telling Nancy to get back to her normal life, but memories of the terrors of the Upside-Down keep playing in her mind, and Jonathan is the only one who understands. And everyone keeps telling Will that he's safe now, and that everything has changed...so why does he keep slipping through realities?

(My imagining of what might happen next following the finale of season 1)

Garden of the Ghost Town

Indiana winters were always pretty cold. This one was no different, at least weather wise. The snow started around six in the morning, and it still hadn't stopped.

Jonathan stood on an old wooden stool as he leaned out and pulled down long strips of ruined wallpaper. One good tug, and half of the haphazard alphabet that his mother had scrawled in black paint over the wall was gone. Old sheetrock waited beneath it. Another pull, and then only the end of the alphabet remained intact.

"What are you doing?"

Jonathan started, and nearly stumbled off of the chair. Even as his pulse rocketed, he knew it was just his brother, reminded himself of that a few times before turning to face him. "God, Will, don't sneak up on me like that."

"Sorry man, didn't mean to scare you."

For a long time after Will returned, Jonathan felt like he'd seen a ghost whenever his brother walked through the halls. After all, he went to his little brother's funeral. He'd seen them pull his limp body from the ravine. He had grieved, for fuck's sake, and while his mother had rambled on and on about how Will was still alive but in treacherous danger, Jonathan prepared himself to face the fact that Will was dead and gone, that his mother was losing her mind, and that once again, he would have to be the one to hold everything together. He knew he'd never be strong enough. Even now, when he knew it had all been a trick, and that Will had never really died, he still awakened sometimes at night uncertain of whether or not the casket had been real. In the darkness and confusion of a half-remembered dream, he tries to piece together details, as if in sleep he defaults to the helpless young man who had just learned of his brother's death. After a few moments, however, clarity returns, the demons run away, and Jonathan collapses back into his bed and waits for his breathing to calm back down.

"It's okay Will. I'm just trying to finish the clean up."

Since the events of the past November, things had quieted down considerably. Once the holidays were over, the family pulled down the myriad Christmas lights that Joyce had used to communicate with her son in the Upside-Down what felt like ages ago. All of the lamps and lightbulbs had been returned to their proper places, and the damage done to the walls had been neatly repaired. Once Jonathan pulled the last of the wallpaper ouija board down, all evidence of Will's time in the Upside-Down would be erased from the Byer household.

Perhaps then moving on would become easier.

"Listen, if you see mom, would you tell her I went out to hang out with the guys at Mike's house? I know she gets a little worked up if she doesn't know where I am."

"Yeah. Sure, I'll tell her when I see her."

Will smiled at him, and Jonathan smiled back; for just a moment, it was as if nothing strange had ever happened in either of their lives. Then Will's smile faded far too quickly, like the moon shuttered out by dark clouds. His expression went dark, years beyond his age, and suddenly he was staring out into the distance as if he was looking at something that only he could see.

"Will?"

Will blinked. "Sorry. Sorry, I...I'll see you later."

"Wait, is everything okay?" But before Jonathan could get his full sentence out, Will was already out the door and into the snow.

When Will arrived with his bike at the Wheeler residence's basement door, shivering and dripping, the first thing he heard was an argument between Lucas and Mike.

No surprise there.

He lingered awkwardly in the doorway. No one seemed to have noticed him come inside.

"Mike," Lucas began exasperatedly, "it's been *months*. Face it, she's not coming back. You just hope that she will."

"You don't know what you're talking about! She's still out there, and now I have the evidence to prove it."

"Guys, guys," Dustin cut in, always the mediator, "can't we all just get along? How about we all sit down and finish our D&D round like good pals who love their friend Dustin?"

Lucas, completely ignoring him, continued, "You've got to be crazy! She's gone! We all saw her disappear with that thing in the classroom. I can't stand hearing you whine about her anymore!"

"Damn," Dustin muttered.

Silence filled the basement. Then Lucas sighed, and added softly, "I'm sorry. I'm not trying to hurt your feelings or anything. I just don't think it's good for you to be thinking about her all the time when she'll never come back. You've gotta move on, y'know?"

"Uh, guys?" Will interrupted. "Hey."

"Oh. Hey, Will."

"What's all the fighting about?"

The three other boys looked at each other. Then they all started talking at once, their words overlapping into an incoherent squabble.

"Whoa, *whoa*! One at a time, my head's gonna explode."

Lucas sighed. "Mike thinks that he found proof that Eleven is still alive just because he found some garbage in the woods."

"*Not* garbage!" Mike exclaimed. "Look!"

From the pocket of his coat, Mike extracted a hard, snow-covered object and slammed it onto the table. Will strained closer and brushed some of the ice off of it. "What the hell is this?"

"It's a waffle! It's an *Eggo*!" Mike declared, poking insistently at the

object. Will leaned even closer and realized that he was right. It was a little old and gross, sure, but it was definitely an Eggo.

“Mmm, delicious Eggos,” Dustin said.

“Yeah, it’s an Eggo, and it’s garbage,” Lucas argued. “How many times have you found old soda bottles and soup cans and stuff just lying around the woods? People litter!”

“That’s different! Have you ever even seen someone litter an Eggo? Probably not!” Mike yelled.

“Okay, everybody relax,” Will said. “It’s just a waffle. And it’s weird, but it doesn’t necessarily mean anything about Eleven. Anyway, we’ve got bigger problems.”

Mike looked as if he wanted to protest, but he fought the urge. “What bigger problems?”

“Upside-Down bigger problems.”

The boys gathered together on the floor of the basement near Eleven’s old little hideout, D&D now totally forgotten, as Will explained the recent visions of the Upside-Down that he’d been having.

“Do you know why it’s happening?” Lucas asked.

“No clue. It just happens randomly sometimes. Like I’ll be sitting on the couch watching TV, and then out of nowhere everything flashes back to that...place. And I always freak out because I think I’ve gone back there for real, but...it never lasts for long. I think I’m the only one it actually happens to, no one else seems to notice it but me.”

“I don’t like the sound of that,” Mike murmured.

“I do. It’s like a freakin’ Star Trek episode,” Dustin said, amazed. Lucas smacked him. “Ouch, what was that for?”

“For being dumb.”

“Guys, c’mon. Can we talk about this for a second? I’m a little freaked

out. I just want it to stop,” Will admitted.

Mike gave him a long, steady look. Then he nodded and said, “Well, that settles it then. Come on everybody, get your bikes.”

“Why, where are we going?”

“We’re going to the woods to look for El. I get the feeling that she’s still out there, and if she is, there’s no one who knows more about the Upside-Down than she does.”

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“I haven’t slept in days.”

Jonathan looked Nancy up and down. Her hair was frizzy, and the undersides of her eyes were tinged a sick grey. She was tensed up, shoulders raised like battleaxes, pale hands clutched together as she tried to keep them from shaking.

“Tell me about it.” Jonathan was no stranger to sleepless nights, either. Whenever he went to sleep, he stared at the ceiling and couldn’t help imagining creatures melting from the walls, and suddenly he was wide awake. “Here, come in. Sorry for the mess.”

Nancy stepped into the house gratefully and took a seat on the couch. Jonathan sat beside her. “How’s the rest of the family been?” he asked.

Nancy shrugged. “Better, I guess. My parents are just happy Mike and I are fine. I don’t think they really realize everything we went through, and if I told them...I’m not sure they’d believe me.”

“Stranger things have happened,” Jonathan said. He found himself smirking.

“Ha. They sure have.”

Quiet fell between them. Jonathan couldn’t help but look at her. She was here, she was beautiful, she was the only person who had ever given him a chance...and she was in love with Steve, the biggest asshole on the planet. He cleared his throat and moved over a bit,

leaving a wider space between the two of them. "So what brings you over here? Thought for sure you'd be over with Steve or something."

Nancy gave him a measured look. "No, not today. I just wanted to see you. To talk, you know."

"Ah. And what did you want to talk about?"

Nancy squirmed, butterfly under a magnifying glass. "I don't know. It's just, I can't really talk about certain things with my parents, or Steve. You're the one who really went through it all with me. And I guess I just wanted to ask how you're handling it all."

Jonathan gave it a moment of thought, then replied, "I guess I'm handling it alright. Will's okay, that's all that really matters." *I'm convinced that they'll come back from the Upside-Down. I'm afraid. And I think something's still wrong with Will.*

"Oh." Nancy looked away. "That's...that's really great, Jonathan. I'm glad you're coping."

"Nancy? What's wrong?"

She reached up and covered her mouth, started trembling. "I don't know. I can't stop thinking about it. I'm paranoid. I'm fucked up." Tears welled up in her eyes. "I'm so fucked up, I can't remember how I used to be."

"Hey, it's okay," Jonathan assured her, but his words sounded hollow even to him. He reached out to put his arm around her, and then pulled back, suddenly remembering where he stood with her. He blushed, and, feeling awkward, looked down. "You don't have to pretend everything is fine. I don't either, I guess. I'm scared too, Nancy, and it's okay. We went through some shit, but it's over now and we're going to get through it. The worst is over. It's over."

Nancy looked up at him with her big brown eyes, tears and running mascara mingling on her cheeks. "It's over?"

"I hope. I wish I could tell you it definitely is."

"What are we going to do if it isn't?"

Jonathan shrugged. "Whatever we have to. We've fought them off once, we can do it again. And you know, if we have to team up again, we'll do it. I'll be there for you."

Nancy blinked. Then she leaned close, pulled Jonathan in, and kissed him, hard.

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When it grew too dark outside to see where they were going in the cold, and the storm became too much to handle, the boys returned back to the Wheeler house in defeat.

"I don't wanna say I told you so, but..." Lucas trailed off.

"Aw, shut up, Lucas. We could barely see anything in that snow. If El's hiding out, we wouldn't have been able to see her anyway," Mike said defensively.

They parked their bikes outside and worked on warming themselves up once they had safely returned to the basement.

"Y'know, seeing as this was a huge waste of time, maybe we should've just stayed in today," Dustin mused. Maybe there was something good on TV."

"It wasn't a waste of time," Will decided, unzipping his wet coat. "Now we know what we need to do next time, and we can cover more ground."

"You mean we're going out there again?" Lucas gasped. "What good will that do? It's only gonna get colder. And anyway--"

Before he could finish his tirade, an abrupt ferocious pounding on the door interrupted him. All four kids fell quiet and exchanged glances. The knocking continued; whoever was on the other side of the door meant business. The pounding carried on for what seemed like years until Mike finally began to creep forward.

"Don't do it!" Dustin hissed. "Are you trying to get yourself killed?"

"Yeah, I don't know about this," Will said slowly. What if it's those

Hawkins energy guys? The Bad Men?"

"Then I'll get a weapon," Mike answered, and picked up the baseball bat in the corner. "We don't have Eleven anymore, anyway. We don't have anything they want."

Mike reached for the doorknob, and after a moment's hesitation, finally wrenched it open, baseball bat swinging at the ready. Outside of the door stood a fairly small, pale figure, one clad in a rough old brown coat, ratty jeans a few sizes too big, and giant black leather boots. Then it took a step forward into the light, and Mike staggered backward in fear until realizing exactly what it was. It was a girl, one with a dirty face and close-cropped hair and a line of blood trailing down from her nose.

The second she saw him, her expression morphed from guarded harshness to unexpected joy.

"Mike."

Author's Note:

More to come. :) We need to catch up with ole Hop and Joyce.

I binge-watched all of stranger things over the course of two days. Also can I just say how much I really love Jonathan and Nancy together? Because I do, my friends. I DOOOOO.

What do you all think??